

<b>Institution:</b> University of Essex		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 32		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Economic and social impacts of 'curating from below' research methodologies		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 1 Sept 2014 - 31 Dec 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Gavin Grindon	Senior Lecturer	1 Sept 2014 onwards
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 Sept 2014 - 31 Dec 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Grindon's body of research addressed the problem of a lack of art-historical and curatorial methods to justly and accurately represent social movements and curate their voices, visual and material culture. Grindon drew on 'participatory action research' methods and developed them as a curatorial practice: partly to curate and research with (as well as on) social movements, and partly to facilitate institutional space for them to speak. These methods developed a series of innovations in curatorial practice, in relation to social movements and contested political issues. The impact of this research was of international reach and occurred in three principal areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economic and social benefits of c347,000 visitors to the V&amp;A; GBP20,000,000M to the economy of Weston-Super-Mare; and a 57.8% boost to the Palestinian tourist industry.</li> <li>2. Developed practices for curators and social movements in collecting and exhibiting protest material.</li> <li>3. Changes to the practices, capacity and/or campaign successes of multiple social movements, organisations and campaign groups, including the umbrella movement (Hong Kong), Stop DSEI (UK), Acorn Tenants Union (UK), and Palestinian solidarity (international). These changes range from the development and distribution of new personal protection methods against tear gas to organisational membership growth and significantly increased media attention, public awareness and understanding of key issues and messages.</li> </ol>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Grindon works in the disciplines of curating; art and design history and visual and material culture. Within these areas, his research has pioneered the study of design and making in social movements as a coherent field. His work has presented original primary histories of such making, and he has also developed new methodologies for art-historical and curatorial research in this emerging field.</p> <p>In art history, he has developed critical theoretical methods that draw on the methods of reading history from below to coherently frame new fields and approaches for an 'art history from below'. These methods are embodied in articles and exhibitions from 2014 onwards about social movement making and the making of social control [R1-4]. In curatorial research, he has developed accompanying methods of dialogue and display 'from below' for curators to work with social movement participants and organisations regarding contested issues. He has done so by developing a curatorial practice informed by participatory-action research methods (where the questions, methods and outputs of research on a stakeholder group are led by the interests of that group, thereby embodying impact in the research process). This underpinning body of work over the years 2014-2020 has principally been embodied across three outputs which are publications</p>		

and exhibitions that he curated or co-curated (working with an artist or institutional curator):

**Disobedient Objects at the V&A/Powerhouse Museum (2014-16):** Grindon's ongoing research on social movement art and design directly influenced the exhibition *Disobedient Objects*, which he co-curated with Catherine Flood at the V&A. It also involved further curatorial research.

*Disobedient Objects* involved a significant conceptual reframing of 'activist art' in relation to previous exhibitions and studies, and it reframed curatorial work not as a sole position of expertise but as a position for the facilitation and advocacy of collective expertise outside the institution. This resulted in departures from the museum's standard practices of casing, labelling, conservation and insurance. For example, a dual system of labels prioritised uncensored labels written by those who made or used the objects. Objects were also accompanied by takeaway 'how to' guides which showed how to reproduce exhibited objects, emphasising their role not as singular, contemplative objects but as open-ended multiples for mass use and adaptation. Even after the exhibition opened, research activity continued: informed by participation from key stakeholders, objects were added, displays were changed, and engagement events took place.

**Cruel Designs/Guerrilla Island at Banksy's Dismaland (2015):** The above methods of dialogue and representation continued and developed in the exhibition *Cruel Designs*, which focused on the role of design for social control. These methods allowed social movement stakeholders to lead the curation of an exhibition of designs which were deployed against them. Labels on military-industrial designs were written by survivors, and a 'how to' guide facilitated a new way to manage encounters with tear gas. Loan credit labels was adapted to prominently identify nations and logos of makers, as the exhibition exposed secretive manufacturers. The methods of participatory curation and dialogue extended into *Guerrilla Island*, a space accompanying *Cruel Designs*, in which Grindon brought campaigning organisations together with *Dismaland's* artists to design and run Constructivist-inspired kiosks for recruitment, advice and workshops.

**The Occupation Museum at Banksy's Walled Off Hotel (2017–ongoing):** The curatorial methods developed throughout Grindon's previous exhibitions, above, were all combined so that civil society and social justice perspectives, which are regularly suppressed under the Israeli occupation, could take up a public space with international visibility for free expression, display and dialogue.

The body of curatorial research work which developed across these projects also raised wider questions about the role of a museum or exhibition as a public space and public service; the cultures which it represents and preserves; and its practical capacity as a medium to facilitate progressive social change.

### 3. References to the research [available from the HEI on request]

#### R1 D: Journal Article

Grindon, G. "Poetry Written in Gasoline: Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker," *Art History*, 38:1, 2015, 170–209. DOI: 10.1111/1467-8365.12129

#### R2 T: Other - A Collection of Creative and/or Critical Work (double weighted):

With Catherine Flood, *Disobedient Objects*, exhibition, V&A, 2014–15; toured to Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia, 2015–16 (REF2)

With Catherine Flood (eds), *Disobedient Objects*, V&A Publishing, 2014. ISBN 1851777970.

Introduction republished in *The Curatorial Studies Reader*, ed. Helena Reckitt and Simon Sheikh, Bloomsbury, 2020 ISBN 9781350082076.

'Disobedient Objects', *Participation in Art and Architecture: Spaces of Participation and Occupation*, ed. Martino Stierli and Mechtild Widrich, IB Taurus, 2015 ISBN 1784530301.

Republished in *Design (&) Activism*, ed. Tom Bieling, Mimesis, 2019 ISBN 8869772411.

*The Idea of the Avant Garde - And What It Means Today, vol.2*, ed. Marc Leger, NeMe, 2019 ISBN: 9781789380880; translated into Portuguese for *Design/Art/Technology* journal, 2019

<https://doi.org/10.29147/dat.v5i3.268>

**R3 M: Exhibition**

*Cruel Designs/ Guerrilla Island*, exhibition, Dismaland, Weston-Super-Mare, 2015 (REF2)

**R4 M: Exhibition**

With Banksy, *Occupation Museum*, exhibition, The Walled Off Hotel, Bethlehem, Palestine, 2017-present (REF2)

**4. Details of the impact**

Whilst at Essex, Grindon's ongoing research generated the following impacts, building upon ongoing impact.

**1. Increased visitors and financial benefits for the V&A, Sydney Powerhouse and the local economies of Weston-Super-Mare and Bethlehem:**

From 1 Sept 2014, *Disobedient Objects* (21 July 2014–1 Feb 2015) brought the history of activist art to c347,000 visitors. At its close it was the best attended V&A exhibition since 1946, with 416,867 total visitors. It welcomed a further 30,000 visitors at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia (31 Oct 2015–14 Feb 2016). Notably, the unprecedented attendance levels in the UK were achieved without an advertising campaign. The visitor demographics for the V&A reveal that the exhibition attracted the highest percentage of first-time visitors compared to similar V&A exhibitions (31%), and far higher than average numbers of young (16-34) visitors (49%) [S1, p.1-5]. *Disobedient Objects* received extensive international press coverage, including strong positive reviews that described it as “*the most exciting, dynamic and emotive exhibition I've seen at the V&A*” (Huffpost, updated 16 October 2014) [S1, p.6].

[Text removed for publication] [S2, p.3]. *Dismaland* (21 Aug–27 Sept 2015) was visited by 150,000 people and contributed a total of GBP20,000,000 to the local economy, including an extra GBP4,500,000 revenue to Great Western Railways (a 100% annual increase) and around GBP7,500,000 to local hotels (reporting 50% increases) [S2, p.1-2]. News coverage was extensive, with 877 online or press pieces, reaching an estimated 24.6m people [S2, p.4]. As of March 2020, the *Occupation Museum* has had approximately 250,000 visitors [S3 p.2]. Both this museum and the hotel which houses it are credited with contributing to Palestine becoming the fastest growing tourist destination in 2017, with 57.8% growth according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation [S3, p.1]. Palestine's Ministry for Tourism and Antiquities also certified that the museum has contributed to the quality of the tourist experience: as “*one of the major attractions in Bethlehem... the hotel and its museum encourage and support acts of solidarity ... a huge economic and cultural impact on tourism to Palestine.*” [S3, p.3].

**2. Advancing curatorial practice:**

Activists in Hong Kong founded The Umbrella Movement Visual Archive “*directly due to Disobedient Objects' inspirations*” [S4, p.1], which made possible the preservation, study and exhibition of the movement's material culture. Grindon's work also influenced wider curatorial debate and awareness [S4, p.6] and larger institutions to reflect on practices of collecting and displaying these objects. In 2016, he was invited to advise curatorial staff at M+ Museum Hong Kong on best practices for collecting and displaying material from the umbrella movement [S4, p.3], and in 2019 he advised the team behind the iconic Trump Baby balloon regarding multiple museum invitations to donate the balloon, which led to agreement to gift it to the Museum of London on the day Trump's presidency ends [S4, p.3]. *Disobedient Objects* was central for the incoming V&A director in marking a new bold direction for the museum; as he wrote in an opinion piece, “[*it*] reminds us that [*design*] can... be the route to a vibrant democracy” [S4, p.4]. It influenced the V&A ‘rapid response collecting program’ developed at the same time, which from 2014 has collected 5 ‘disobedient objects’, including an umbrella from Hong Kong protests [S4, p.7] and a ‘pussy hat’ from anti-Trump protests [S4, p.7]. *Disobedient Objects* was followed by a slew of exhibitions in the UK which directly emulated Grindon's original identification of objects and material culture in disobedient agency in their conceptual frame (sometimes also echoing *Disobedient Objects' participatory curatorial methods*) [S4, p.7]. From a baseline of zero such

exhibitions, there was a preponderance of similar titles and framings in the following years: 'I Object: Ian Hislop's Search for Dissent' (British Museum 2018); 'From Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics' (Design Museum 2018); 'Disobedient Bodies' (Hepworth Wakefield 2017); 'Disobedient Buildings' (Oxford University, 2019). The UK Art Fund went as far as to mistakenly congratulate the Hepworth for Disobedient Objects in public communications [S4, p.7].

### 3. Influences on social movements and campaigns:

#### A. Social Movement Designs: Makeshift Tear Gas Masks

Disobedient Objects' impacts occurred in the context of ongoing research, and as a continuum of impact arising from earlier iterations of that research. Several of the objects featured in Disobedient Objects, particularly those accompanied by a 'how to' guide, were picked up and used by new protest movements. In such contexts, the objects were used to physically facilitate protest, to protect people from harm and to express international solidarity. A key example of this was the 'makeshift tear-gas mask', whose 'how to guide' was downloaded from the V&A 1546 times. Following a sharp peak in downloads during the first Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson, Missouri [S5, p.1], the guide was extensively shared online. For example, it was later shared by the main Black Lives Matter Instagram account with 4.2M followers [S5, p.2], which allowed protesters to make masks themselves to protect and care for each other in the face of police violence [S5, p.2].

From September 2014, Grindon engaged with those sharing the guides online, including activists in Hong Kong, where the guide was used to produce around 100 masks which were handed out to people on the front lines of the protest during September and October. The masks also appeared to accompany other acts of making echoing objects in the exhibition [S4, p.1, S5, pp. 3, 4]. The masks most recently resurfaced prominently during the Palestinian Great March of Return protests in 2018 in Gaza [S5, p.5]. One unexpected cultural impact evidences the project's wider cultural reach: the guide appeared in 2016 as a key plot device in the Hollywood film *10 Cloverfield Lane* [S5, p.5].

#### B. Organisation Growth and Capacity-Building

In Dismaland's Guerrilla Island, Grindon curated a collaboration in which the tenants' union Acorn Bristol staffed a playfully titled 'Comrades Advice Bureau' decorated by artist Stephen Powers. It offered advice on housing and rental issues. Their national organiser described this as a "*massive springboard in our development... we doubled our membership to 6000+ [while the exhibition was open], and recruited volunteers to help organise in Bristol, Newcastle, Sheffield, London, Birmingham and beyond.*" A Weston-Super-Mare branch was also established. [S6, p.1].

Dismaland - the site of both Cruel Designs and Guerrilla Island - took place at the same time as the DSEI arms fair. Whereas Cruel Designs' curatorial focus employed the exhibition as a form of critical exposure for many military-industrial designs, the arms fair simultaneously exhibited several of the same objects under more shadowy conditions. As part of Guerrilla Island, 'ad space hack pack' kits were sold to the public, for the purpose of opening bus-stop advertising spaces to alter or replace the advertisements. Grindon curated a commissioned selection of bus stop posters 'advertising' the secretive arms fair, which accompanied parallel campaigns by Stop DSEI, Campaign Against the Arms Trade and Amnesty International seeking to close the fair. Posters and toolkits were made available publicly, and over 300 were placed around London, producing viral media "*increasing the capacity and impact of the 2015 anti-DSEI campaign*" and influencing the "*growth of artists' participation in anti-arms protest*" in the following years [S6, pp.2-3].

#### C. Advocacy, International Public Awareness and Understanding

The Occupation Museum inside Banksy's Walled Off Hotel, open since 2017 in Bethlehem, Palestine, developed the research practices of Disobedient Objects and Cruel Designs in a new context. Grindon's curatorial research facilitated a Palestinian-led narrative on the occupation. The goals were to support and expand on the existing regional 'solidarity' or 'justice' tourism, and to raise understanding of the issues facing Palestinians. The museum grounds the playful hotel in a project of widening understanding. As part of a popular tourist destination, it aimed to educate its

250,000 visitors on the occupation and offer a prompt to discuss these issues with local Palestinians. To amplify this intended impact, the museum is a starting point for tours of the wall, Hebron and East Jerusalem offered by a local solidarity tourism company. The visitor book and online reviews regularly cite the transformative experience of visiting the museum specifically. Of 277 TripAdvisor reviews (as of March 2020) 145 mention the museum, reflecting on it as, for example, “A great experience to expand your understanding of the situation” [S7, p.2] and recommending that “you must do the museum!!!! It is situated inside the hotel had me in awe. It is probably one of the best museums I've visited. A real eye-opener which may have you in floods of tears [S7, p. 25]... I'm not normally a museum person, but this was the first museum where I physically read every single placard and sign... [it] provided an insight to what the local people go through” [S7, p. 40]. Handwritten responses in the visitor book by the museum exit also evidence changed understandings: “This is a great museum. Thank you! I will take what I've learned back to my students.” [S8].

The museum has also had impact at a policy and diplomatic level, supporting the diplomatic efforts of Palestine's government. After the President of Palestine visited the museum, he “recommended that all the diplomats and official delegations that come to Bethlehem should come and visit” [S3, p.2]. Visitors have included all resident ambassadors and representatives in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Tel Aviv (including ambassadors from Japan, Canada, India and elsewhere); the British Minister for Tourism; the Brazilian Foreign Minister and others. The museum has helped, for example, a member of the Australian Senate to identify and advocate issues which she raised in a speech to the Australian Parliament, saying “the Walled Off Hotel's most interesting element was its small museum... if every tourist who came to Bethlehem... went through that museum they would be much better informed of the conflict” [S9].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### Increased visitors and financial benefits for the V&A, Sydney Powerhouse and the local economies of Weston-Super-Mare and Bethlehem:

**S1** Economic and Visitor Impacts: Disobedient Objects (NB – figures given in narrative calculated from those reported here for dates when author was in post at Essex: from 1 Sept 2014 – 1 February 2015)

**S2** Economic and Visitor Impacts: Cruel Designs

**S3** Economic and Visitor Impacts: The Occupation Museum

### Advancing curatorial practice:

**S4** Testimonial from Umbrella Movement/New York Times Article/Testimonial for Trump Baby – Museum of London/Evening Standard Article/V&A online catalogues items/Tweet from The Art Fund

### Influences on social movements and campaigns:

**S5** Social Movement and Campaigns: Makeshift Tear Gas Masks: Download data, V&A, Interview and image on use in Ferguson protests/ social media posts of use of tear gas masks cable ties and barricades in Hong Kong protests/ use in Palestine

**S6** Social Movement and Campaigns: Testimonials from ACORN/Campaign Against the Arms Trade/Independent article on Dismaland and the Arms Fair

**S7** International Public Awareness and Understanding: table of 145 Tripadvisor reviews (as of March 2020)

**S8** International Public Awareness and Understanding: selected quotes from visitors book from Walled Off Hotel

**S9** International Public Awareness and Understanding: speech from Tasmanian MP.